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UNCLAS ABUJA 002738

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: OIL WORKERS' STRIKE CAUSES SHORT-LIVED
GASOLINE SHORTAGES

REF: ABUJA 2567

1. PENGASSAN, Nigeria's white collar oil and gas union, in cooperation with the blue collar Nigerian Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas (NUPENG), held a one day "warning strike" on September 23 to protest the planned privatization of certain downstream operations of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) (Reftel). In solidarity, oil tanker drivers, who are NUPENG workers, stopped transporting gasoline from September 20-23. The strike was scheduled to last through Tuesday, September 24, but was called off earlier after the reported intervention of Minister of Employment and Productivity Alhaji Musa Gwadabe. In Lagos, most gasoline stations had sufficient reserves to continue pumping gasoline during the strike, though some refused to do so for fear of NUPENG reprisals. In other parts of Nigeria, the impact was more severe, with lines at the pumps reaching more than one kilometer in Abuja. There have been no reports of violence associated with the strikes, and as of September 25, lines at fueling stations were returning to more typical lengths of ten to twenty cars deep. Comment: The unions intended the warning strike to scare the GON into shelving plans to privatize NNPC's refineries. If the unions cannot secure an agreement they find satisfactory, they are likely to follow through on their threats to strike again. Privatization does not enjoy much domestic support. With elections quickly approaching, the President will almost certainly postpone privatization plans for fear of the political damage that would be caused by an extended fuel strike. End comment.
JETER